

Re: Comments for review of the 716 area code for the Arcade Area

Pioneer Central School District has a communications problem that needs your attention.

Our district, located 35 miles southeast of Buffalo, encompasses 12 Communities and 250 square miles. Our geography includes parts of four different counties - Cattaraugus, Allegany, Wyoming, and Erie. One of our four school facilities is in downtown Arcade (Wyoming County), and our other three are in northern Cattaraugus County. We serve 3,200 students and about 15,000 geographically dispersed residents. Pioneer represents a historically significant consolidation of three separate districts that occurred nearly 35 years ago.

This background may help you to understand why communications and coordination of services, are constant challenges for us. We certainly appreciate the time and effort it takes to build a sense of community. A community-wide celebration of our district's 35th anniversary is scheduled later this year. By no coincidence we rely heavily on electronic communications including telephone calls, e-mail and our own web site to sustain our identity and serve our children.

Our problem is that the Pioneer school community soon will be undermined by the scheduled November 15 implementation of a decision by the State Public Service Commission (NYSPSC) to divide our district into two different area codes. The Arcade Chamber of Commerce has provided the enclosed summary of the events leading to the Commission's decision. Essentially, the local exchanges of 492 and 496 (within the Arcade Town and Village area) are due to receive an area code, associated with the Rochester area; while the remainder of exchanges within our school district would maintain the same area code they have now — one associated with the Buffalo region.

We are deeply concerned about the negative impact this decision on means of communication we have nurtured for years. Parents are likely to ask, "Why should I contact the school about my child or get involved when the school is no longer even in my area code?" Or they may question, "Why should I call my child's teacher when using a different area code surely will cost me more than it should. After all, I already pay taxes to support the schools!" Pioneer school officials may be seen by many residents not as a community developer but as a perpetrator of economic hardships in an impoverished area, a source of inequitable treatment, and an endorser of governmental interference.

We depend greatly on partnerships with businesses and other local organizations. Many of the newer businesses growing in the Arcade area (most directly affected by the area code change) are key facilitators of internships and other routes to employment preparation and career development. Making phone or e-mail contact more difficult or confusing will discourage these partnerships as well as the economic vitality of the businesses, themselves. Local businesses

and others organizations we depend on may refrain from using innovative communications technology the district has developed for community and student use with substantial help from federal grants.

The Arcade Area Chamber's concerns focus mainly on the town and village of Arcade. Our broader view is that all phone exchanges within the geographical confines of Pioneer School District should be subject to the same 716 area code. This includes the exchanges of 492,322, 457, 496, and 537.

Your intervention or expression of concern to the state Public Service Commission, if appropriate through the FCC, can make a significant difference at this point. The Chamber's account provides disturbing evidence of missing or misleading communications from the State Department of Public Service. We share this bureaucratic concern. However, we are just as concerned about potential erosion of our steady efforts over the last 35 years to unify our school community.

Your efforts on our behalf will be deeply appreciated.  
Please see the map below.

